

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 395

CG 016 527

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TITLE Primary Prevention through Organizational Change:
Improving Program Evaluation Practices.
SPONS AGENCY Michigan State Office of Services to the Aging,
Lansing.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
American Psychological Association (90th, Washington,
DC, August 23-27, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) --
Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Delivery Systems; *Evaluation Methods; Human
Services; Older Adults; *Organizational Change;
*Participative Decision Making; *Program Evaluation;
Program Improvement; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Goal Setting

ABSTRACT

While efforts directed toward aiding the individual elderly will continue to be necessary, the widening gap between seniors' needs and available resources requires broader based interventions at the organizational level. In order to move such organizations to adopt program evaluation as a technique for improving organizational effectiveness, a longitudinal field experiment was designed to change the program evaluation practices of organizations providing service to the elderly in three regions in Michigan. Agencies (N=43) participated in a workshop designed to disseminate knowledge of program evaluation methods and were subsequently assigned to a consultation intervention or a control group. The consultation intervention consisted of six, weekly consultation sessions of two and one half hours each, focusing on goal setting techniques. Scores from workshop participants and others were combined to provide a single organization score. Analyses of responses showed strong support for the consultation intervention, with participants in consultation reporting greater rates of program evaluation activities. The findings suggest that the provision of workshops, the method of choice for changing practices in human service organizations, may not be as effective as participative goal-setting. (MCF)

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ED227395

Primary Prevention through Organizational Change:
Improving Program Evaluation Practices¹

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Paper presented at the symposium, "Field Experiments in Aging:
Implications for Theory and Practice"(Donald D. Davis, Chair),
American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., 1982.

1. This research was made possible by a grant from the
Michigan Office of Services to the Aging. The opinions
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CS 016527

Primary Prevention Through Organizational Change:

Improving Program Evaluation Practices

Abstract

The increasing number of older adults and the decreasing level of resources available to provide services to the elderly are discussed. It is argued that the gap between available services and those requiring them will widen. It is suggested that improving the program evaluation practices of service providing organizations may increase the number of elderly who can be helped. A randomized field experiment examining the ability of a consultation intervention employing participative goal-setting to change the program evaluation practices in 43 organizations providing services to elderly is discussed. The experimental consultation was found to be very effective in changing these organizations. The results are discussed within the framework of an innovation adoption model.

Primary Prevention through Organizational Change:

Improving Program Evaluation Practices

I am sure that the increasing number of elderly adults is well known to the audience. Equally well known is the continued reduction in resources available to address the needs of older adults. The current state of affairs is one in which the gap between the needs of seniors and the resources available to meet these needs is broadening.

The complexity of this problem requires multiple levels of intervention to increase the probability of success. Focusing efforts only on individuals, while ultimately effective and important, is insufficient due to the inordinate level of resources that will be needed. While efforts directed toward the individual elderly will continue to be necessary--and as Drs. Quattrochi-Tubin and Jason have just shown, such efforts may be validated with rigorous empirical methods--exclusive reliance on the individual for the focus of change will become more insufficient as the population of seniors increases and resources do not keep pace with this growth.

Interventions focusing on small groups of the elderly may increase the potency of change efforts. The processes inherent to small groups, e.g., cohesion and pressures to conformity, may amplify the power of any intervention. The job-placement training program just described by Dr. Gray is a good example of this phenomenon. By training seniors to seek jobs in small groups, these processes were manipulated such that success

became more likely. In the job club, the presence of others acted to motivate seniors to continue in their job search in spite of the high rate of failure associated with this activity. Moreover, with the focus on small groups, many more seniors could be served with a given level of effort. Seniors meeting and receiving services as a group require less time from professionals, or others, trained to teach job-seeking skills.

The present paper discusses yet another, and perhaps more powerful, method to address the needs of the growing numbers of seniors. It is the premise of the present paper that even larger numbers of older adults may be reached by directing interventions to the organizations that provide services. By changing the practices of organizations intervening directly with the elderly, one may ultimately change the elderly themselves. By improving the practices of these organizations, one may improve the services actually provided to seniors. It is believed further that the prevention of the problems inevitably arising as a consequence of the increasing proportion of seniors, and the diminishing resources available to them, requires change in the current practices of gerontological service providers.

One of the most powerful techniques for improving organizational effectiveness is program evaluation. Program evaluation is conceived here to include the use of needs assessments, quasi- and experimental designs, and cost analysis procedures, including cost/benefit and cost/effectiveness analysis.

These techniques provide a set of innovative management decision tools capable of contributing to the reduction of uncertainty associated with making programmatic decisions. That is, program evaluation methods may be used to determine systematically and empirically whether intervention programs (services) are effective and efficient and, consequently, whether or not to continue or change them. The question addressed by the intervention discussed in the present research was, "What is an effective method capable of moving organizations providing services to the elderly toward adoption and implementation of program evaluation methods".

The present paper describes a longitudinal field experiment designed to change the program evaluation practices of organizations providing services to the elderly in three regions in Michigan. Specifically, the efficacy of a goal-setting consultation intervention was examined. An innovation adoption model (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973) was used to interpret the data; the adoption of program evaluation methods was viewed as a special case of the adoption of innovations by organizations.

Method

Sample

The directors of organizations providing services to older adults in three Area Agency on Aging regions in Michigan (Grand Rapids, Lansing, Southfield), were invited to attend a free, two-day program evaluation workshop. Each organization choosing to participate was asked to select one staff

member to attend. It was suggested that the agency director, if unable to attend, should send the staff member usually responsible for evaluation-related activities. Participating agencies represented the spectrum of public and private sector organizations providing services to the elderly, e.g., nutrition, legal aid, home-care, and transportation. Although 56 organizations first participated in the workshops, only 43 were used in the final data analysis. (Three organizations did not complete both days of the workshop; participants from 7 organizations withdrew for a variety of reasons, including insufficient time, lack of interest, or refusal by higher level administrators to allow continued participation; and participants from 3 organizations did not provide services--instead, they were exclusively administrative.)

Measurement

All workshop participants, and one other staff member nominated by them as being most knowledgeable about agency practices, completed all measurement instruments. Organizational descriptive and demographic information was collected during the workshops. Respondents were interviewed over the telephone after the end of the consultation intervention and four weeks later to report their program evaluation practices. (See Figure 1). Respondents reported whether their organization performed any of 32 program evaluation activities asked of them and, if so, when they first began these activities. These semi-structured interviews were coded by two graduate students

in psychology. Coders were trained until acceptably high intercoder reliability was achieved. The average correlation between coders was .95. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of this measure was .88.

Experimental Design

The first phase of the intervention included the dissemination of the innovation, i.e., program evaluation methods. The innovation was disseminated through a two-day workshop in program evaluation planning and methods. Participants were also given a specially edited program evaluation manual to assist in their implementation of program evaluation methods. The purpose of the workshop was (1) to equalize across participants, as much as possible, knowledge of program evaluation methods and (2) to provide a comparison with the method most commonly used by policy makers to change the practices of human service organizations, i.e., workshops.

Program evaluation was conceived to include several diverse components ranging from establishment of program objectives and goal-setting to use of randomized experiments to measure program effectiveness. Knowledge of these techniques was taught primarily in didactic modules. Small group exercises were interspersed throughout the didactic sessions to allow participants the opportunity to apply the information to their own service.

Subsequent to each workshop, participants in each region were randomly assigned either to a six-week consultation intervention (experimental group) or to no further treatment (control group).

The consultation intervention was designed to increase knowledge of program evaluation methods, assist in the development of positive attitudes toward the use of program evaluation methods, and foster the adoption and implementation of program evaluation methods. Because of the short period of time today, only the success of the intervention in fostering adoption will be discussed. (Presentation of other outcome data is currently being prepared for publication.)

The experimental intervention consisted of two and one-half hour consultation sessions held weekly for six, consecutive weeks in each of the three regions. Participants selected their own ultimate program evaluation goal. Weekly objectives were set publicly and consisted of small steps in the direction of the accomplishment of the ultimate goal. For example, if the ultimate goal was evaluation of program effectiveness, the participant might first set an objective to have a staff meeting to discuss this idea with relevant staff members. (This was encouraged.) When recording this objective, the participant was instructed to be sufficiently specific such that someone else could accomplish the objective in the absence of the participant. In the case of a staff meeting, for example, the number of meetings would be determined, persons to be invited would be named, and, if possible, a date and location would be selected.

Each week objectives were chosen that required greater and greater behavioral commitment to the accomplishment of the ultimate goal. Continuing the example above, the second session

required participants to report accomplishment of the previously set objectives. If all objectives were not successfully achieved, participants again set unaccomplished objectives. Additionally, new objectives requiring greater commitment were set. For example, a participant might next determine possible outcomes to examine, select standardized measurement instruments, select a sample for a pilot test, and conduct a pilot test of the instruments and intervention. The objectives set in the last session (6th) of the consultation intervention typically included dates for pretesting, administering the intervention (service), and posttesting. In this fashion, participants progressively adopted and implemented program evaluation methods, thus allowing trialability, a condition important in successful innovation adoption (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971).

Results

Scores from workshop participants and nominate others were combined to provide a single organizational score. Individual reports were combined to increased the veridicalness of judgements (cf. Seidler, 1974). The empirical support for aggregation came from two sources. A oneway analysis of variance of responses from all organizations providing two respondents revealed significant interorganizational variance ($p .001$), with an intraclass coefficient of .49, suggesting agreement between respondents within organizations. The more conservative measurement of percent exact agreement between respondents within each organization also revealed agreement (percent exact = .66).

The effectiveness of the consultation intervention was estimated with a oneway, repeated measures analysis of variance.

Analysis of responses revealed a strong, significant main effect for the intervention condition; participants in the consultation reported greater rates of program evaluation activities (Table 1 and Table 2). There was no significant main effect for time of time-by-intervention-interaction, as would have been expected. The omega squared revealed that a considerable portion of variation in responses to this measure of evaluation practices was accounted for by the intervention condition.

The failure of the time-by-intervention-interaction to reach significance was probably due to the short time period between the post- and follow-up measurement periods. A oneway analysis of variance of the difference scores of these two time periods also was not significant. These results provide further evidence for the absence of a significant interaction (Huck & McLean, 1975).

An analysis of covariance, holding constant knowledge of program evaluation methods, organization size, and organization budget, still revealed a significant main effect for the consultation intervention.

Discussion

Because of the small sample size, preliminary nature of the investigation, and possible measurement inadequacies, including reactivity to the interview measure, the reported results must be interpreted cautiously. Although only tentative, several conclusions seem evident.

First, the results appear to show that the simple provision of workshops, the method of choice for changing the practices of human service organizations, may not be as effective as the use of participative goal-setting. This finding provides further support for the use of goal-setting techniques to create change and increase performance (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). This finding also suggests that policy makers in aging must use techniques that possess considerably more structure, and stem from empirical support, such as goal-setting, if they wish to change successfully the practices of service providers in the aging network. The use of techniques such as the one reported above will become increasingly important in years ahead as the population of seniors increases and the adoption and implementation of innovative practices becomes more necessary.

Second, these results demonstrate that it is possible to improve the program evaluation practices of service providers in the aging network. This finding is important because the practice of program evaluation techniques is absolutely necessary to conclude with any confidence that services being provided are indeed improving those for whom they were intended.

Finally, the results show that longitudinal experimental designs can be used in natural settings to measure the effectiveness of interventions. Such designs provide the most unequivocal conclusions regarding intervention effectiveness (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). The use of rigorously tested change techniques will increase in importance in future years.

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Table 1
Repeated Measures ANOVA:
Adoption of Program Evaluation Practices

<u>Source</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Prob.</u>	<u>2</u>
Time	1	.03	.02	n.s.	
Time X Intervention	1	.22	.13	n.s.	
Subjects X Time	41	1.64			
Intervention	1	249.82	18.40	.0005	.21
Subjects	41	13.58			

Table 2
Mean Scores For Adoption of Program Evaluation Practices

	Posttest	Follow-up
Intervention Group (n = 24)	4.14	4.27
Control Group (n = 19)	.81	.74

Figure 1
Intervention and Measurement Schedule

